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SUBJECT: DCM METS WITH PM CHIEF OF STAFF ON NEIGHBORS  
CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT, DEBAATH

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) On February 27, Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel Speckhard met with Tariq Abdullah, Chief of Staff to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to discuss ideas for the upcoming Neighbor's Conference that Iraq will host in March. Abdullah said Maliki's government was pleased by the Council of Minister's approval of the draft hydrocarbon law and thought prospects for quick Council of Representatives passage were good. Abdullah stated that PM Maliki was considering suspending the current DeBaathification principles as a show of reconciliation and to spur creation of a fair and realistic DeBaathification law.

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Neighbors Conference Announced  
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¶2. (S) DCM Speckhard congratulated COS Abdullah on the announcement of the Neighbor's Conference to be held in Baghdad in March. The US, Iran, Syria and other regional nations have been invited to participate. DCM suggested that the PM's office issue a statement on the event and offered Abdullah some proposed language for the Maliki's consideration. Abdullah agreed that it would be a good idea for the PM to establish a public position and welcomed the draft statement.

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Hydrocarbon Law: Possible Quick CoR Passage?  
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¶3. (S) DCM told Abdullah that Sunday's passage of the draft Hydrocarbon Law by the Council of Ministers was an important step in promoting Iraqi unity and economic development. Abdullah agreed, quoting the Minister of Planning saying it was "the greatest achievement since the passage of the Iraqi constitution." Abdullah added that the solid support the draft received in the Council of Ministers augured well for its swift passage when the Council of Representatives (CoR) returns in early March.

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Debaathification, Evenhandedness, Boosting DDR  
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¶4. (S) DCM emphasized the need for the PM to show bold leadership on Debaathification, as the creation and passage of a fair law is crucial to developing national unity. Abdullah responded that Maliki was considering suspending the current Debaathification principles in a show of reconciliation that he hoped would spur efforts to pass a reasonable and just law. DCM replied that this would be an

outstanding display of leadership on Maliki's part and would send an important positive signal to the Sunni community. Abdullah agreed, saying that it was a necessary step, adding that it was important not to punish former party members who had committed no crimes.

¶5. (S) Abdullah emphasized the PM did not "play favorites" with the militias and that suggestions by many bordered on "slanderous." Abdullah pointed out the PM's recent actions in support of the BSP and against armed Shia elements Diwaniyah that resulted in the arrest of 159 suspected militia members. DCM agreed that Maliki has shown great commitment to even handedness during the BSP. DCM Speckhard stated that the Disarming, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process seemed to have stalled and suggested that he and COS Abdullah make a joint presentation to help reenergize it. Abdullah said he thought this was a good idea. He also mentioned that he was appointing a Baghdad University professor of political science, Dr. Khalil al-Rubaie, as the Executive Director of the GOI DDR Committee. The PM's advisor on reconciliation and DDR announced this on February ¶28. The Chief of Staff also mentioned a planned March 4 conference to gather former Saddam-era soldiers for potential reintegration and/or pensions.

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BSP Economic Surge  
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¶6. (S) DCM advised Abdullah that Secretary Rice anticipated difficult congressional hearings for the supplemental funding intended to support the Baghdad Security Plan's "economic surge". Abdullah stated that the PM understood that future U.S. expenditures were likely to be lower, but emphasized

that U.S. support and expertise were as important as U.S. financial assistance.  
KHALILZAD